



April 8, 2002

Mr. James L. Hall
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Criminal Justice
P. O. Box 4004
Huntsville, Texas 77342

OR2002-1735

Dear Mr. Hall:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 160908.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (the "department") received a request for the criminal background investigation that was prepared by the Office of Inspector General as part of the requestor's application for employment with the department. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You claim that the requested information is excepted in its entirety under section 552.108(b)(1) of the Government Code. Section 552.108(b)(1) excepts from disclosure the internal records and notations of law enforcement agencies and prosecutors when their release would interfere with law enforcement and crime prevention. Open Records Decision No. 531 at 2 (1989) (quoting *Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706, 710 (Tex. 1977)). We do not believe this exception applies to the information at issue. See Open Records Decision No. 361 at 2-3 (1983) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108(b) inapplicable to background information collected on unsuccessful applicant for employment with sheriff's department). Cf. Open Records Decision Nos. 562 at 10 (1990) (predecessor to section 552.108(b) inapplicable to employment information in police officer's file). Therefore, the department may not withhold the requested information from disclosure based on section 552.108.

You contend that a portion of the submitted information is excepted under section 552.101 of the Government Code. Section 552.101 excepts "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Criminal history record information ("CHRI") generated by the National Crime Information Center ("NCIC")

or by the Texas Crime Information Center ("TCIC") is confidential. Title 28, part 20 of the Code of Federal Regulations governs the release of CHRI that states obtain from the federal government or other states. Open Records Decision No. 565 (1990). The federal regulations allow each state to follow its individual law with respect to CHRI it generates. *Id.* Section 411.083 of the Government Code deems confidential CHRI that the Department of Public Safety ("DPS") maintains, except that the DPS may disseminate this information as provided in chapter 411, subchapter F of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 411.083.

Sections 411.083(b)(1) and 411.089(a) authorize a criminal justice agency to obtain CHRI; however, a criminal justice agency may not release CHRI except to another criminal justice agency for a criminal justice purpose. *Id.* § 411.089(b)(1). Other entities specified in chapter 411 of the Government Code are entitled to obtain CHRI from DPS or another criminal justice agency; however, those entities may not release CHRI except as provided by chapter 411. *See generally id.* §§ 411.090 - .127. Thus, any CHRI generated by the federal government or another state may not be made available to the requestor except in accordance with federal regulations. *See* Open Records Decision No. 565 (1990). Furthermore, any CHRI obtained from DPS or any other criminal justice agency must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with Government Code chapter 411, subchapter F. The submitted documents include CHRI obtained from DPS and/or generated by TCIC and NCIC. Accordingly, this information is excepted from required public disclosure by section 552.101 of the Government Code.

You ask whether the requestor has a special right of access to this information under section 552.023 of the Government Code. Section 552.023 states that a person or a person's authorized representative has a special right of access to information that relates to the person and that is protected from disclosure by laws intended to protect the person's privacy interest. CHRI obtained from DPS and/or generated by TCIC and NCIC is governed by section chapter 411 of the Government Code, not section 552.023. Thus, the requestor does not have a special right of access under section 552.023 to the CHRI held by the department. The department must therefore withhold such information from disclosure under section 552.101 of the Government Code.¹ The remaining information must be released to the requestor.²

¹We note, however, that the requestor may obtain her own CHRI directly from DPS. *See* Gov't Code § 411.083(b)(3).

²Some of the submitted documents contain or consist of confidential information that is not subject to release to the general public. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023. However, the requestor in this instance has a special right of access to the information. Gov't Code § 552.023. Because some of the information is confidential with respect to the general public, if the department receives a further request for this information from an individual other than this requestor or her authorized representative, the department should again seek our decision.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen A. Eckerle".

Karen A. Eckerle
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KAE/sdk

Ref: ID# 160908

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Candace S. McCarthy
P.O. Box 1699
Pampa, Texas 79066-1699
(w/o enclosures)